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ABSTRACT

This pamphlet presents a strategic plan to guide and direct the Special Education Services Unit of the Colorado State Board of Education as it seeks to meet the needs of Colorado students with disabilities and their families. The plan was developed by parents, educators, administrators, policymakers, advocates, and representatives of other groups concerned about the well-being of Colorado's students with disabilities. The plan outlines a vision, mission, and values. It then presents six goals, each accompanied by objectives and strategies. The six goals focus on: (1) developing a responsive, collaborative family-centered system of educational and human services based on the strengths and needs of the child within the context of the family, and ensuring access to and coordination of services; (2) enhancing knowledge and skills of Colorado's families, communities, and educators; (3) ensuring full inclusion of persons with disabilities in the life of their communities; (4) increasing communication and responsiveness to the circumstances of students with disabilities and their families; (5) developing an effective and efficient educational system; and (6) implementing performance standards for all students. (JDD)

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A Blueprint for Building the Future

A Strategic Plan for Special Education Services in Colorado

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WE ARE RESPONSIBLE TO BE SUCCESSFUL IN THE SITUATION WE ARE IN RATHER THAN THE ONE IN WHICH WE WOULD LIKE TO BE.

— *Participant in the development of the* Blueprint

Introduction

In 1988, the Colorado State Board of Education adopted goals for improving education in Colorado. Specifically targeted as being in need of a statewide plan of action were increases in attendance and graduation rates, and improvements in achievement levels. At about the same time, discussions began about the restructuring of education in the state, including some specific discussion related to the unification of the "special education system" with the "regular education system."

These two events—coupled with the need for the Special Education Services Unit of the Colorado Department of Education to be responsive to its clientele in this time of changes and fiscal uncertainty—led to the idea of developing a strategic plan that would help guide and direct the Special Education Services Unit as it sought to meet the needs of its Colorado students with disabilities and their families.

On July 21, 1992, the Special Education Services Unit called together a group of more than 40 people in a planning process that would extend until the fall of 1993. Participants included parents, educators, administrators, policymakers, advocates, and representatives of other groups concerned about the well-being of Colorado's students with disabilities and their families. The group established a goal of bringing the planning process to a close within one year. The passage in 1993 of House Bill 1313, which addressed educational standards and restructuring,

added urgency to the planning process and provided impetus for bringing it to a close within the one-year goal established by the group.

Participants divided themselves into four work groups focusing on school, community, intergovernmental cooperation, and family. Their first task was to study the Colorado Department of Education's vision, mission, and values statements, and to use these statements to develop goals and objectives that will guide special education in Colorado for the next five to ten years. Their second task was to develop timelines and action strategies to make the goals into reality.

Seeing the need to fit special education into the larger overall picture of school restructuring in Colorado, participants solicited ideas from the groups they represented. For example, principals contacted other principals for their input, and parents reached out to other parents to learn their ideas and concerns. In addition, one of the work groups distributed questionnaires across the state to determine how Coloradans define "community" and how communities can proactively support the full inclusion of students with disabilities and their families.

This *Blueprint for Building the Future* summarizes the best thinking of not only participants in the process, but those they represent. It should not be viewed as final and unalterable. Instead, after careful consideration, participants determined that what began as a plan should become a "blueprint," because while it provides goals for policy-makers, its objectives and strategies can be modified as conditions and needs change.

In the coming months, participants and staff of the Special Education Services Unit will meet with groups across the state to present the *Blueprint* and to encourage their participation in making its dream a reality.

Participants who spent many long hours to develop the *Blueprint* are listed below. The Colorado Department of Education is grateful to them for their time, caring, and commitment:

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Vision, Mission, and Values Statements

of the Special Education Services Unit, Colorado Department of Education

Vision

We envision:

- An education system in which all students are valued as learners who experience success and are prepared for community living and participation.
- Communities that are respectful of diversity and proactive in support of the full inclusion of individuals and families in all aspects of community life.
- A health and human services system that is responsive to the unique circumstances of individuals and families and respects their rights to make choices.
- A society in which all individuals are valued and active participants.

Mission

The mission of the Colorado Department of Education, Special Education Services Unit, is to provide the leadership that ensures and promotes a dynamic and effective system of education for students with disabilities in Colorado.

Values

The Colorado Department of Education, Special Education Services Unit, adopts values in which:

- Students with disabilities are active participants with their non-disabled peers;
- Support is available within the schools and other settings to enable students to benefit from their individually determined education;
- A full range of services is available to each student and family;
- Parents are informed partners with professionals in planning and ensuring the delivery of education and related services;
- Each student has the opportunity to gain knowledge and skills; and
- Each student leaves school ready to contribute to society.

Goals, Objectives, and Action Strategies

for the Special Education Services Unit, Colorado Department of Education

GOAL 1: Colorado will develop a responsive, collaborative family-centered system of educational and human services that is based on the strengths, needs, and unique circumstances of the child within the context of the family, and that will ensure access to and coordination of services.

Objective 1. To develop a system that ensures that service providers work in partnership with families to identify and address the comprehensive needs of students with disabilities. (Target date: July 1996 and ongoing)

Strategy A. Create or utilize existing interagency councils to promote integrated services (for example, include Part H, preschool councils, special education advisory committees, or Social Service Placement Alternatives Commissions).

Strategy B. Require meaningful family representation on local interagency councils.

Strategy C. Assist in the development and implementation of local interagency agreements to meet unique community circumstances.

Objective 2. To involve families in the development and implementation of collaborative service plans that provide for all the needs of children and families. (Target date: July 1999 and ongoing)

Strategy A. Assist Local Education Agencies (LEAs) in identifying and utilizing a variety of services and resources to support families, including support in the areas of respite care, nutrition, emergency funds, before- and after-school care, recreation, transition, transportation, and specialized equipment.

Strategy B. Obtain commitment of resources from multiple agencies through contracts and reciprocal agreements.

Strategy C. Identify flexible funding that can be used to establish and maintain new services.

Strategy D. Establish a student follow-up system to monitor both the provision of services and family satisfaction.

Objective 3. To promote family-centered services models in communities across the state. (Target date: July 1997 and ongoing)

Strategy A. Develop a family-centered services model.

Strategy B. Assist local interagency groups to develop action plans to implement the family-centered services model.

Objective 4. To assure that participation of families is representative of the diversity of the community. (Target date: July 1996 and ongoing)

Strategy A. Assist LEAs to identify the demographics of the community.

Strategy B. Promote selection of diverse parent representation on local planning groups.

Strategy C. Assist LEAs to provide access to information and services in a variety of formats designed to meet diverse family needs (language, literacy, culture).

Objective 5. To promote individual and family wellness. (Target date: July 1994 and ongoing)

Strategy A. Cooperate with other units of the Colorado Department of Education and all local, state, and regional education and human services agencies to develop a model for a comprehensive wellness education program.

Strategy B. Model individual wellness activities within the Special Education Services Unit and encourage the extension of wellness activities to employees' family members.

Strategy C. During the Individual Educational Planning process, encourage the consideration of all the needs of the child and family (including physical and emotional well-being, and fulfillment of such basic needs as food, clothing, shelter, and income), and refer to community resources if necessary.

GOAL 2: The knowledge and skills of Colorado's families, communities, and all educators will continue to be enhanced.

Objective 1. To ensure that training efforts address identified needs of families, communities, and educators, and to deliver training in geographic areas when appropriate. (Target date: September 1994 and ongoing)

Strategy A. Conduct surveys to discover training needs.

Strategy B. Develop a plan to provide resources and conduct training statewide, regionally, and/or locally, as appropriate.

Strategy C. Provide support to communities to establish family, school, and community education and training programs and partnerships.

Objective 2. To coordinate all training efforts of the Colorado Department of Education. (Target date: September 1994 and ongoing)

Strategy A. Develop and continually update a master calendar of all training efforts of the Department.

Strategy B. Disseminate the master calendar and information about training opportunities statewide and on an ongoing basis to agencies and personnel (such as directors of special education and BOCES, families, advisory groups, and superintendent of schools).

Strategy C. To include general education personnel in staff development conducted by the Special Education Services Unit.

Objective 3. To encourage higher education systems involved in educator training programs to provide training to all educators concerning family issues and collaborative service-delivery. (Target date: July 1, 1994, and ongoing)

Strategy A. Encourage review of curricula to ensure the inclusion of family issues in educator training programs.

Strategy B. Assign staff members from the Special Education Services Unit as liaisons to each educator training program in Colorado.

Strategy C. Encourage colleges and universities with educator training programs to assign liaisons to the Special Education Services Unit.

Strategy D. Facilitate joint training efforts between school districts and colleges and universities with educator training programs.

GOAL 3: Colorado will take steps to ensure that persons with disabilities are fully included in the life of their communities.

Objective 1. To increase community awareness of persons with disabilities and issues related to disabilities and to support community agencies and organizations that seek to include those individuals fully in the life of the community. (Target date: July 1997 and ongoing)

Strategy A. Provide community groups with concise information about disabilities that affect Colorado's children and youth.

Strategy B. Develop a menu of responses to community requests for additional information about disabilities, including a system by which communities can gain access to this information.

Objective 2. To help individuals with disabilities and their families make choices about their community involvement. (Target date: July 1995 and ongoing)

Strategy A. Identify strategies that will help individuals with disabilities and their families involve themselves in their communities.

Strategy B. Disseminate these strategies to school districts and interagency groups.

GOAL 4: There will be increased communication and responsiveness to the unique circumstances of students with disabilities and their families throughout the state's education and human services system.

Objective 1. To develop and implement a process that will review existing state-level interagency agreements to determine whether they reflect the values of the Special Education Services Unit's mission statement, and to update them as necessary. (Target date: July 1995 and ongoing)

Strategy A. Select an existing interagency agreement to serve as a pilot; conduct hearings with individuals who represent different constituencies so as to identify obstacles to achieving the values of the mission statement; and revise and distribute the agreement.

Strategy B. Train the appropriate individuals to implement the updated interagency agreements.

Objective 2. To make legislative and administrative recommendations to the Colorado Department of Education that will make the education and human services systems more responsive to the unique circumstances of individuals with disabilities and their families. (Target date: July 1995 and ongoing)

Strategy A. Hold public hearings to determine legislative and administrative issues, and analyze which of the issues can be addressed administratively (regulations, policies, procedures, practices, preservice and inservice training), and which must be addressed by legislation.

Strategy B. Make recommendations to the Colorado Department of Education to act upon recommendations from the public hearings.

Objective 3. To increase communication among state-level agencies involved with the education of students with disabilities and their families. (Target date: July 1995 and ongoing)

Strategy A. Establish better communication networks within the entire Colorado Department of Education, including agreement on clear, common language between general education and special education.

Strategy B. Establish and maintain a system of communication with the Departments of Health, Social Services, and Institutions (and the new departments to be created) as these departments are restructured.

GOAL 5: Colorado's educational system for students with disabilities will be effective and efficient.

Objective 1. To seek full funding for special education costs. (Target date: 1996 and ongoing)

Strategy A. Identify adequate state revenue to fulfill Colorado's Exceptional Children's Educational Act or integrate special education costs into a new public school funding formula.

Strategy B. Develop a more uniform excess-cost formula for out-of-district placements and clarify allowable costs for providing comparable services.

Strategy C. Develop written procedures or guidelines that will help staffing teams determine which medical and mental health services are the fiscal responsibility of school districts.

Strategy D. Provide written guidelines regarding staffing ratios and their relationship to funding, and ensure that the process is equitable.

Objective 2. Expedite distribution of state funds to LEAs. (Target date: December 1993 and ongoing)

Strategy A. Assure the adequate staffing of Colorado Department of Education personnel involved in the reimbursement process.

Strategy B. Assign operations personnel to each region to provide technical assistance and solve problems.

Objective 3. To develop a process that will ensure the availability of federal dollars to meet contracted obligations. (Target date: Ongoing)

Strategy A. Continue to streamline the Colorado Department of Education's fiscal distribution process to local special education units.

Strategy B. Ensure that the Special Education Services Unit submits state plan revisions to the federal government so as to ensure the flow of federal funds to Colorado at the beginning of each school year.

Objective 4. To standardize and streamline the special education reporting system. (Target date: Ongoing)

Strategy A. Utilize discretionary dollars earmarked for the regions to provide ongoing training that will assure local fiscal and administrative efficiency.

Strategy B. Streamline the data collection system to be more consistent with the general education process.

Strategy C. Ensure that a representative from the Special Education Services Unit serves on the Information Processing Association Committee.

Objective 5. To improve and expedite the special education licensure and certification application process. (Target date: July 1997 and ongoing)

Strategy A. Simplify the special education staff approval process.

Strategy B. Encourage the Teacher Education and Certification Unit to develop policies to approve certification at one location within one department and to ensure that certification is finalized within six weeks of application.

Strategy C. Encourage the Teacher Education and Certification Unit to develop reciprocity policies with other states.

Strategy D. Urge the Teacher Education and Certification Unit to add the opportunity for candidates in the Alternative Certification Program to qualify for special education endorsements.

Strategy E. Work with institutions of higher education and other state licensing agencies to develop programs for flexible and affordable special education endorsement.

GOAL 6: Colorado will adopt and implement performance standards for all students, including students with disabilities, and will develop quality indicators for the delivery of special education services.

Objective 1. To develop performance standards that incorporate both state and federal legal requirements and ensure that proposed standards will positively affect students with disabilities. (Target date: House Bill 1313 timelines)

Strategy A. Conduct a study of Colorado administrative units and other states as to how certified diplomas would address students with disabilities.

Strategy B. Based on the findings of that study, make recommendations regarding performance standards to the State Board of Education and other appropriate policy-making bodies.

Objective 2. To develop and disseminate quality indicators for the delivery of special education services. (Target date: July 1996 and ongoing)

Strategy A. Gather information relating to effective models in the delivery of services to students with disabilities.

Strategy B. Identify the quality indicators within the effective models.

Strategy C. Assist districts to implement their models and to use quality indicators to evaluate the effectiveness of the services provided to students with disabilities.

Strategy D. Recognize administrative units that effectively implement quality indicators.

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